

13 March 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJ: Middle East Developments [REDACTED]

1. The Middle East Ad Hoc Working Group met in the National Indications Center conference room at 1000, Thursday, 12 March 1970. Based on a review of developments in the Middle East during the past week, the Working Group considered the following comments appropriate.

a. Military. The lull in air combat activity was interrupted 12 March by the first Israeli air raid against UAR targets since 6 March. The resumption of air activity by the Israelis may have been timed to coincide with the Big Four talks in New York. The lull appeared to have more political than military significance. Unusual Soviet naval activity in the eastern Mediterranean was noted during the week, but a judgment as to the significance of this activity must be deferred pending further analysis. [REDACTED]

b. Soviet Military Assistance. Available evidence still does not permit any firm judgment as to the exact nature and scope of the Soviet commitment to improve the air defense capability in the UAR. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Soviet military involvement may be limited to the operation of ground equipment and will not include the use of Soviet pilots in air combat missions. We noted a continuation of Soviet AN-12 flights to the UAR. We also considered the possibility that a change in the pattern of military cargo shipments by sea to the UAR has occurred, but concluded that a more intensive examination of current Soviet merchant shipping traffic to the UAR is necessary before any judgment can be made. In discussing the Soviet-PLO relationship, it was concluded that the Soviets probably promised to support the PLO with arms, but under conditions (such as unification of Palestinian resistance organizations) which could have the effect of negating any meaningful support. [REDACTED]

c. Diplomatic Activity. The results of Vinogradov's trip to Cairo may be apparent at the 12 March Big Four talks in New York. Therefore, pending the receipt of a report from USUN on these talks, no assessment can be made on new developments in the diplomatic arena. [REDACTED]

d. Miscellaneous Activity. We noted the increasing vulnerability of Lebanon to Soviet pressures to accept military assistance. [REDACTED]

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THE MIDDLE EAST CRISIS

The objective of this paper is to establish a baseline upon which judgments may be made as to developments in the Middle East situation. These may serve as indicators of Soviet intentions to initiate hostilities against the United States or her allies. While the greatest potential for a US-Soviet military confrontation lies in the escalation of Arab-Israeli hostilities, we believe that developments outside of this immediate context may well provide us with indications of Soviet intent. Therefore, with this in mind, this paper will present a summary of the Middle East situation in terms of those areas of analysis most significant for indications purposes.

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Soviet Attitudes Toward the Middle East

The Soviets look upon the Middle East as an area of strategic importance in political, ideological, and military terms. The traditional geopolitical view of the Middle East as a special Russian sphere of interest is augmented by an ideologically inspired view that the Middle East is one of the main arenas of the Soviet struggle with the US. The Soviet leaders hope ultimately to establish their hegemony over the area through the emergence of local power elites sympathetic to communism. Militarily, the area is seen as a strategic zone which, in friendly hands, protects the southern flank of the USSR and permits Moscow to extend its influence into the Mediterranean and beyond. In short, the Middle East is, in the Soviet world view, proximate, important, and vulnerable.

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Great power interests of the USSR in the Middle East and considerations of self-interest have pushed the Soviets toward a moderating or cautious rather than incendiary

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role in a number of regional disputes (e. g., Cyprus, Shatl-al-Arab) as well as in reacting toward relations between radical and non-radical Arab regimes. Moscow's realization that local Communist parties in many countries are either weak or unreliable, or both, has caused the USSR to pursue ideological objectives principally on the level of government-to-government relations rather than by clandestine means. Even in the Arab-Israeli crisis, where the USSR has long supported the Arabs at the expense of Israel, Moscow continues to seek stablization of the situation because it wishes to avoid confrontation with the US. [REDACTED]

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Soviet attitudes toward Arab-Israeli hostilities can best be summarized as: "No war, no peace." Within this context, the USSR appears to be following a course of action which has become an increasingly intricate and complicated juggling of contradictions but which, nevertheless, seems to be guided by elementary political pragmatism.

Egypt remains the linchpin of Soviet activity in the Middle East. Cairo has been chief recipient of Soviet military and economic aid in the area. Nasser remains the singlemost influential Arab leader, and it is upon him that Moscow lavishes its moral and political support. Soviet relations with the other Arab states vary. Despite Soviet military and economic aid to Algeria, Syria, and Iraq, relations fluctuate considerably. The Soviets lack the ability to influence government policy; on certain issues, these states oppose the USSR outright. Recent coups in the Sudan and Libya have provided new opportunities for Moscow to expand its influence in the Middle East. Although the Soviets have thus far been unsuccessful in their attempts to ingratiate themselves with the new regime in Libya, the expulsion of the US and Britain from their bases in the

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country and other Libyan policies have been well received in Moscow. The Soviets have been considerably more successful in the Sudan, but have proceeded cautiously in extending aid. Moscow has been notably successful in Southern Yemen where they have established a firm beachhead on the Arabian Peninsula. Elsewhere in the Middle East, Moscow maintains correct, but not particularly warm, relations with Lebanon and the conservative monarchical states except Saudi Arabia. [REDACTED]

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There has been in recent months a perceptible change in the Soviet attitude toward the fedayeen. The Russians have never felt able to go along with the uncompromising hostility of the fedayeen to the existence of Israel (which the Soviet Union herself recognizes), and the Soviets have not been impervious to the consideration that Arab terrorist behavior does not assist the climate for a political settlement. Since October, however, Soviet leaders have made a number of statements expressing support for the fedayeen cause. Thus far, however, the Soviet government has assiduously avoided providing "direct assistance" to the fedayeen. The cautious handling of the Arafat visit to the Soviet Union and the use of non-government agencies, such as the Komsomol and the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, reflect the ambiguity of Soviet policy toward the fedayeen. Some arms supplied by the Soviets to Arab governments are passed on to the fedayeen. [REDACTED]

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Soviet recognition of Israel, although an embarrassment from time to time, has had little or no effect on Soviet-Arab relations. [REDACTED]

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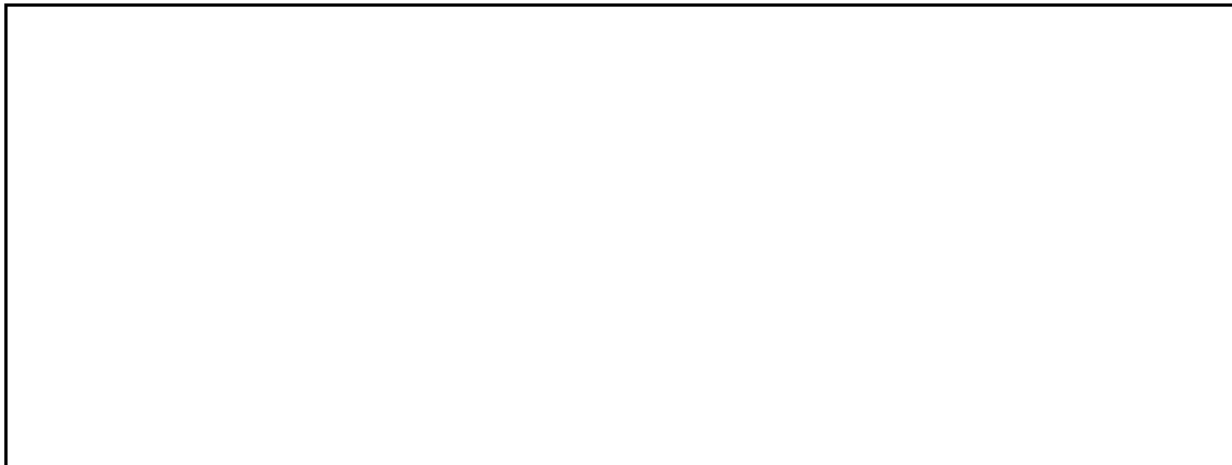
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Soviet Attitudes Toward Two- and Four-Power Talks

Moscow recognizes the danger that conditions in the Middle East may get out of hand, with the concomitant risks of new defeats for the Arabs, loss of Soviet prestige if this occurs, and possible confrontation with the US. The Soviets are concerned that continued tension might further increase fedayeen influence and radicalize the Middle East to a dangerous, irreversible, and - most important to the Soviets - uncontrollable degree. These are the dominant reasons why Moscow has pursued negotiations in the context of the four-power talks. Moscow's willingness to supplement these negotiations with two-power talks probably stemmed from a desire to reap further propaganda benefits and to enhance her position as a Great Power on equal footing with the US. []

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There are other political reasons for Moscow to seek a settlement provided it is acceptable to Nasser. Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and their subsequent return to the Arabs would be a major triumph for Moscow. In addition, a settlement would be unlikely to end suspicion and tension in the area, and Soviet military aid and political support would still be in demand. Finally, negotiations provide defacto recognition of Soviet interests in the Middle East. []

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The act of negotiating at all bears some political risk for the USSR, especially with regard to its relations with the more radical Arab States. Moscow, however, has taken no meaningful steps in the talks that might hasten success in reaching agreement. In fact, the Soviets have become increasingly intransigent in the negotiations - most

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recently at the 12 February meeting of the big-four UN Permanent Representatives in New York, when the Soviet representative reacted strongly to a US proposal for a four-power appeal for observance of the cease fire in the Middle East. This probably reflects not only Cairo's attitude toward the proposal but an unwillingness to compromise a probable Soviet commitment for increased military aid to the UAR, resulting from Nasser's visit to Moscow in late January. The Soviets have repeatedly demonstrated their unwillingness to get out in front of Cairo in the negotiations - a reluctance probably due to their desire that any resulting document be acceptable to Cairo, and, of course, to avoid offending Nasser. [REDACTED]

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The current Soviet pessimism on the chances for a settlement probably stems from what Moscow considers to be the US and Israeli failure to make necessary concessions, notably on reversion of the occupied territories. Further, the escalation of Arab-Israeli hostilities is undoubtedly adding to Soviet pessimism for a peaceful solution of the Middle East crisis. [REDACTED]

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Soviet Military Presence in the Middle East

The Soviets have substantially increased their military presence in the Middle East since the June war. This presence has been most visibly demonstrated by the increased numbers of Soviet advisers attached to Arab forces and the strengthening

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of Soviet naval forces in the area. The political objectives of these naval forces are to show the flag, to promote the image of the USSR as the defender of the Arab States, to demonstrate that the Soviet Union is truly a global naval power, and to reveal to the world that the Mediterranean Sea is no longer an exclusive preserve of the US Sixth Fleet. Primary military roles are to have some deterrent effect on the Israelis- particularly from attacking Egyptian ports - to monitor operations by the Sixth Fleet, to develop capabilities against Polaris submarines, and, in the event of war, to counter western naval forces, possibly in conjunction with Arab navies. [REDACTED]

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Since 1964, the Soviets have maintained a continuous naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, the Soviets have deployed token naval forces to the Indian Ocean since early 1968. Although the most significant augmentation of the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron took place just prior to the June war, the Squadron has since grown to become the largest Soviet naval force outside home fleet operating areas. In addition to surface combatants, submarines, and auxiliary ships, the Squadron is augmented by Soviet naval aircraft (with Egyptian markings) based near Cairo which provide an aerial reconnaissance and ASW capability. [REDACTED]

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Since the June War, the Soviets have concluded a number of "facilities arrangements" with the UAR which permit Soviet naval units in the Mediterranean to make use of specified storage and repair facilities in Alexandria and Port Said on a regular basis. It may be that the Soviets sought to conclude similar arrangements with Syria and Algeria, but, if so, there is no evidence that either country has acquiesced. Regardless, Soviet ships make frequent visits to Arab ports in the Mediterranean, the Red

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Sea, Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean. Soviet naval units are continually present at Alexandria and Port Said. [REDACTED]

The Soviets thus far have demonstrated a measured response to varying levels of tension in the Middle East. Departures from operational norms have been noted in Soviet naval activity during major crises, such as the June War and the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and during periods of increased tension in the Middle East. For example, the Mediterranean Squadron has been augmented either by extending deployments or by deploying additional combatants from the Black Sea. (The Soviets are believed to provide for contingency deployments from the Black Sea by the near-continuous scheduling of a cruiser-destroyer force for transit through the Turkish Straits.) An increase in the readiness posture of the Mediterranean Squadron has been evident in the movements of units into the eastern Mediterranean, intensive surveillance of major Sixth Fleet units, and establishing surveillance patrols in the major choke points of the Mediterranean. These abnormalities in operational patterns, by themselves, are not necessarily cause for concern and must be considered in light of developments elsewhere. [REDACTED]

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